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Citing Orwell's '1984,' judge orders Trump administration to return slavery exhibits removed from Philadelphia museum

6 HR AGO

By Piper Hudspeth Blackburn

Signage about slavery is displayed on an outdoor exhibit at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on October 24, 2025. (Michael Yanow/NurPhoto/Getty Images/File)



A federal judge, evoking the dystopian world of George Orwell's novel "1984," ordered the Trump administration on Monday to return a long-standing exhibit

on slavery it removed from a popular historical museum in Philadelphia.

US District Judge Cynthia Rufe, an appointee of former President George W. Bush, included multiple references to Orwell in her ruling granting the City of Philadelphia's request to restore the exhibit panels to Independence National Historical Park while litigation over their removal continues.

“As if the Ministry of Truth in George Orwell’s 1984 now existed, with its motto ‘Ignorance is Strength,’ this Court is now asked to determine whether the federal government has the power it claims—to dissemble and disassemble historical truths when it has some domain over historical facts. It does not,” Rufe said, referring to the famous novel, which deals with themes of oppression and rigid governmental control.

Last month, work crews took down large display panels at the President’s House Site, where Presidents George Washington and John Adams once lived. Soon after, the city sued the administration in federal court, claiming the government was required to consult with the city before making any changes.

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Siding with the city, Rufe noted that Congress passed legislation that “specifically limited” the authority of the Interior Department to “unilaterally alter or control” the park.

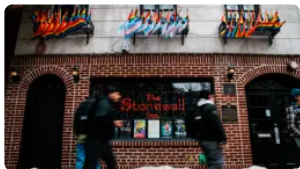
“The government can convey a different message without restraint elsewhere if it so pleases, but it cannot do so to the President’s House until it follows the law and consults with the City,” Rufe wrote.

CNN has reached out to the White House, Interior Department and Philadelphia

Mayor Cherelle Parker for comment.

The dispute is playing out as the Trump administration has ramped up its effort to **purge cultural institutions** of materials that conflict with the president's views ahead of the **nation's 250th anniversary** in July.

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Philadelphia City Council President Kenyatta Johnson celebrated the ruling, saying in a **post on X**, “Black history is American history, and we won’t let Trump erase our story.”

Democratic Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro previously criticized the removal of the slavery exhibit, saying the White House was **“whitewashing” history**.

In an **executive order** signed last March, President Donald Trump accused the Biden administration of advancing “corrosive ideology,” specifically citing Independence Park, and called upon the Interior secretary to remove contents that “inappropriately disparage Americans past or living.”

Since then, the White House has also launched a review of Smithsonian museums and exhibits to get rid of what it considers anti-American propaganda.

“The American people will have no patience for any museum that is diffident about America’s founding or otherwise uncomfortable conveying a positive view of American history, one which is justifiably proud of our country’s accomplishments and record,” White House officials wrote to the Smithsonian in December.

Last year, the American Battle Monuments Commission, a small, little-known

federal agency, also took **down a cemetery display** in the Netherlands that commemorated the contributions of African American WWII soldiers and highlighted the discrimination they faced.



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